

A
DISCOURSE
ON THE
RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

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*The Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus
considered,*

IN A

DISCOURSE

FIRST DELIVERED IN

THE ASSEMBLY-ROOM, AT BUXTON,

On Sunday, September 19, 1790.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

AN ADDRESS TO THE JEWS.

By Joseph Priestley, LL.D. F.R.S. &c.

Birmingham,

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THE
P R E F A C E.

THE following discourse was composed while I was at Buxton, in the course of the last summer, in consequence of being requested to preach to the company in the assembly-room, after the usual morning prayers of the church of England. Having no sermon with me that I thought so proper as I could wish for so mixed an audience, I composed *this*, which I thought would offend no christian, but tend to confirm the faith of all; and which I also hoped might make a favourable impression on unbelievers, some of whom it was probable would be my hearers. Both these objects I have reason to think were, in some measure, gained; and in compliance with the request of some who were my hearers at that time, and of many others who have heard the discourse, much enlarged and improved, since, I now publish it.

Let any man who is an object of dislike, as I am to the clergy of the church of England, con-

duct himself with ever so much prudence and caution, I do not think it is possible for him to avoid giving offence. On this occasion, however, I flattered myself that I had succeeded; but I have since found that I did not. A person, who I believe may be stiled a dignitary of the church of England, has been very free with his virulent invectives against me on this most innocent business; asserting, on the authority, he says, of those who were present, and who, it is supposed, were also clergymen, that I in a manner forced myself upon the audience, by *requesting* to preach to them, which he calls "a most indecent intrusion*," and that I took the opportunity of "insulting the faith "and the service of those who attended it," that by "desiring to have the litany omitted on that "occasion, I shewed the most pointed disapprobation of the service, and took upon myself to "rule and direct the service of the church of "England;" that my discourse "gave great "offence to several persons of respectable understanding, who uniformly represented it as calculated to weaken the evidence of our Lord's "resurrection as a divine and miraculous fact, "wrought in conformity to the antient prophecies;" that "it was scarcely attended to "with patience," and that "in opposition to the "solemn service which the congregation had just "before offered to the trinity, and in contradiction

* The passages marked with inverted commas, are from the clergyman's own letter, which was written with deliberation, on purpose to be shewn to me.

“to those rules of the church, which forbid the
“maintaining of opposite doctrines by different
“preachers, I closed the whole with an unitarian
“prayer.” On the whole, he adds, “I easily
“perceive where this would end, if the Doctor’s
“power was equal to the disposition he has manifested towards the church of England. There
“would be as little toleration of those who should
“use the liturgy, as there was in the days of
“Cromwell.

All this, and much more, having, as I have been informed, been said on the occasion, it may not be amiss to give the following short account of the matter; and hundreds who were present can witness the truth or falsehood of the greatest part of it.

Having, at the unexpected request of the company at the inn where I lodged, read a sermon to them on a Sunday evening; on the Tuesday following, General Stratton, and Mr. Sligo, a gentleman of fortune in Scotland, came to me, deputed, as they said, by the company at the Grand Hotel, and the other houses near the Baths, to request that I would give them a sermon on the Sunday following. I replied that, if it was the wish of the company, I would readily comply with it; and returning my compliments to them, desired them to name the time and place. Some time after this they came to me again, and said

that the company, having considered of it, were of opinion that the most convenient place would be the assembly-room; and that the time that would best suit them all would be after their usual morning service, which however, with great liberality, they said they did not desire me to attend, as I might not approve of it; and that in this case I might be in the adjoining card room till it was over.

Now, though I certainly do object, and very seriously, to do any thing that should be construed into a joining in trinitarian worship, or offering to any creature, how distinguished soever, that homage to which I consider the one true God, the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, to be alone entitled, I make no scruple of attending the worship of any human beings occasionally, as a stranger and spectator; and I had no intention of absenting myself on the present occasion, till I found I could not prevail on the clergyman who read the prayers to shorten the service, which, on account of the length of my discourse, I wished him to do.

Not succeeding in this, I took an opportunity some time after the prayers were begun, of retiring into the card-room, for the sake of looking over my discourse, and striking out such parts of it as could best be omitted. When this was done, I returned to the prayers before they were quite finished.

finished. Still, however, my discourse was considerably longer than usual: but I was heard with the greatest attention, nor did I perceive any marks of disapprobation from any of the company. I concluded the service with a short prayer, addressed, as most of the prayers in the liturgy of the church of England are, to the Father only; so that if this was a contradiction to the trinitarian forms in the same liturgy, some of the prayers in this book are contradictory to the rest.

After the service, I was thanked not only by General Stratton and Mr. Sligo in the name, as they said, of the company, but by many of the most respectable persons present, some of whom avowed religious sentiments with respect to the trinity very different from mine; and in consequence of a previous invitation by the Provost of the university of Dublin, I dined at the Grand Hotel, where some of the particulars of my sermon, being new to part of the company, were the subject of conversation, and every thing that I heard was much in favour of it. Several clergymen were present at my discourse, and one of them, I was told, expressed much approbation of it. Others, it appears, were much offended at my being asked to preach on this occasion, and one of them, I was told, made an attempt, but without success, to express his disapprobation, in a discourse composed on purpose for the Sunday following. This, however, I did not know at the time, for the

the next morning I proceeded on my journey, and left the place.

Much of the offence that I gave on this occasion was by "taking upon me" (as this dignitary says) "to perform a part of the ministry of the church of England, in a place of that description." Now, not to observe, that the place in which I preached was not consecrated, and that the appropriation of the building to the offices of any particular mode of religion was not a thing to be considered by *me*, but by those who applied to me to officiate in it, I see no reason why christians of the most opposite sentiments may not meet to worship together, and edify one another, on principles that are common to them all, avoiding the introduction of any that would give offence. If I had an opportunity (which I would by no means decline) of preaching before a society of high calvinists, or the most rigid catholics, I would do it in such a manner as not to offend any of them, and yet I should have a sufficient choice of topics on which to discourse. For the most important articles, not only of christian practice, but also of christian faith, are those in which all who ever called themselves christians are, and always were, agreed; nor should I have any scruple to desire any christian minister, of whatever denomination, to preach for me, if I knew him to be a man of sense and discretion, who would observe the same rule of prudence in my pulpit, that I should make a point of doing in his.

I am

I am not sorry to have this opportunity of saying that I and my congregation gave this proof of our liberality in this respect the very last year, by inviting Mr. Berington, a catholic priest in the neighbourhood of Birmingham, to preach our annual Sunday-school sermon. All the subscribers to that charity were convened on the occasion, after it had been the subject of much conversation several weeks before; and on my proposing it, it was cheerfully and unanimously acceded to; and one of the company very pleasantly and properly said that, as the devotional part of the service on that occasion would fall to me, he hoped that on that day I would omit praying for the downfall of antichrist; which I very readily engaged to do. The invitation was accordingly sent, and as the reader will see, by a copy of the letters which he will find subjoined to this Preface, was very properly received, though it was not complied with, for prudential considerations, which I hope will not exist long.

I should have been ashamed of any congregation to which I officiate, had they made any difficulty of acting so liberal a part. We did not desire Mr. Berington to celebrate mass, or to do any thing else in which we could not concur with him; nor, I am confident, would he obtrude upon his audience any sentiments that he knew would be displeasing to them; and then what objection could there be to his principles as a catholic, when they

they did not appear. A Jew, or a Mahometan, might recommend charity, and what christian could object to hear him do it, if he did it well. From officiating in our places of public worship no men of sense, and of good moral characters, are excluded by any forms of consecration. We are ready to accept of the services of any person by whose discourses we can hope to be edified. Would all christians act upon this generous principle, and be ready to meet on every piece of ground that was common to them, true catholicism would be greatly promoted, prejudices would much sooner die away, and truth, which we are all equally interested in discovering, would have a much better opportunity of prevailing over error than it now has.

To the Rev. Mr. Berington.

DEAR SIR,

It is with peculiar satisfaction that I communicate to you the very hearty and unanimous request of the subscribers to our Sunday school, to give us a sermon at the New Meeting, on any Sunday that shall be most convenient to yourself, within about a month from this time, when a collection will be made for the purpose, in aid of our subscription.

subscription. We have all been charmed with your excellent and liberal tract on the subject, and we wish to show the world that, different as our persuasions are, we can meet together on the common principles of christianity and benevolence.

With very great respect, I am,

Dear Sir,

Birmingham,
Oct. 18, 1790.

Yours sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Mr. Berington's Answer.

DEAR SIR,

THE request of the subscribers to your Sunday school, which you have communicated to me, has given me great pleasure, though it has excited my surprize. It seems to indicate the dawn of better days, when difference in speculative belief shall no longer divide the hearts of christians. The novelty only of the proposal surprized me. Nor can I sufficiently admire the liberality of sentiment manifested by the subscribers on the occasion, a liberality which at all times I should be most happy to imitate, and to enforce. But I cannot comply with their request. It would give offence, I fear, to the society of which I am a member, (so unprecedented is the measure) and willingly I would not shock even the prejudices of others, unless by that shock I might reasonably hope to surmount them. The temper of the times likewise must be weighed,

weighed, lest by precipitance we rather check, than encourage, that happy tendency to benevolent and generous sentiments which rapidly advances among those of my persuasion, and which you, and other friends to the best interests of men, are effectually labouring to establish in a wider sphere.

I beg, Sir, you will convey my apology to the subscribers in the most grateful terms. They may know that I truly value the opinion they entertain of me, and that though, from prudential motives, I cannot comply with the letter of their request, it shall be my endeavour to serve the great cause they patronize by every means in my power. We differ, it is true, in points to which men, I think, have given an undue weight; but the common principles of christianity and benevolence, as you express it, must ever remain, I trust, equally dear to us all.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours most sincerely,

Oscot,
Oct. 20, 1790.

J. BERINGTON.

THE subscribers to the Sunday-school being convened to receive this answer, we could only lament that any reasons of prudence should be an obstacle to Mr. Berington's compliance with our request, and even defer our exhibiting to the world an example of that liberality in which christians are so much deficient, and which we wished to take this opportunity of recommending.

An

An Address to the Jews.*

Worshippers of the One True God,

UNDER this noble appellation, unhappily not as yet applicable to the great body of christians, it is with peculiar satisfaction that I address you; having in this respect the honour to rank with you. But do not be offended that the generality of christians should have been drawn aside into idolatry, worshipping a creature instead of the creator, when your own ancestors, notwithstanding the manifest tokens of divine power accompanying them, and though he stood in a peculiar relation to them, and shewed them distinguished favour, were for many ages drawn aside in a similar manner, worshipping the sun, the moon, and the host of heaven, instead of the great Being who made them. Time and discipline brought you to a just sense of your duty, and things are evidently taking the same course with christians.

The time is happily come when the eyes of great numbers are opened to see their errors; and being enlightened themselves, they are zealous to give their light to their brethren.

* An amicable conference with some Jews who heard this discourse was the occasion of this address to them. A freer intercourse with Jews and christians would have a good effect on both.

We

We are now well satisfied that Jesus Christ, though a true prophet of God, is no more an object of divine worship than Moses, or any other prophet. He was himself, as one of your nation, a humble worshipper of the God of your fathers, and he instructed his followers to worship no other than him. These christians are called *unitarians*, in opposition to the *trinitarians*, who pay divine honours to two other persons besides *the one God and Father of all*; and you cannot have been so inattentive to the present state of things among christians, as not to perceive that the unitarian doctrine is very rapidly gaining ground. The belief of the *divine unity*, and also that of the proper *humanity of Christ* are not now the private opinions of a few persons only, which some time ago they were almost afraid to avow, but they are publicly professed by great numbers, the most respectable for their ability, their learning, and their piety, among christians. They are also not confined to one nation, but are to be found in almost every part of the christian world. Nor are you to judge of the number of unitarians from those who openly profess themselves to be so. They now abound in all churches professedly trinitarian, though, from timidity, or some other motive, which I do not undertake to defend, they do not make a public avowal of their sentiments. By this means, however, things are ripening apace for a general declaration in favour of unitarianism whenever circumstances shall be favourable to it.

I was

I was much surprized, but far from being displeased, at one instance of your extreme scrupulosity on this subject. Many of you, when you heard me deliver the following discourse in Essex Chapel, were, I find, much offended at my calling Christ *Lord*, thinking it to be an appellation too nearly approaching to those which in the scriptures are appropriated to God. We cannot well be too cautious how we ascribe to any creature, though the most distinguished prophet, those titles which are more usually given to the supreme Being. But be assured that I had no such meaning, or intention; nor would any Englishman so understand me. By the term *Lord* we simply mean *master*, which all christians acknowledge Christ to be, since God has appointed him to be our teacher and instructor, and we therefore call ourselves by his name. Be assured also that I would never make use of the term again, if I thought that, after reflecting on the subject, it would give you the least offence.

Agreeing with you in this fundamental principle of all religion, particularly intrusted, as it were, to the guardianship of your nation; when you were set apart from the rest of the world, you will naturally look upon us with less aversion than you have hitherto justly done christians in general; and I hope you will be induced to give a more patient and candid attention to what we have to propose in favour of the divine mission of Christ, and compare our arguments with those which you

are able to produce in proof of the divine mission of Moses, and that of your other prophets.

I have already addressed you twice at large upon this important subject; and writing, as you are satisfied, from a principle of the purest goodwill to your nation, I am happy to find, that my *Letters* have not displeased you. Happy indeed, should I think myself to be, in any measure, the instrument in the hand of divine providence of opening the eyes of any of you to your true interest, and thereby of restoring you to the favour of God, and to that future glorious state which is destined for you. This great event, however, God will bring about in his own time, in his own way, and by whatever instruments he pleases. And I hope the time is approaching, when, as the prophet Zechariah (chap. xii. 10.) has foretold, "he will pour upon you the spirit of grace and of supplication, and when you shall look upon him whom you have pierced, and shall mourn for him as for an only son," as sensible of the wickedness of your ancestors in rejecting and crucifying Jesus, avowing yourselves his disciples.

Having before requested your attention to the evidences of christianity in general, let me now solicit it to that of the resurrection of Jesus in particular, as the most important fact in the gospel history. Examine the evidence which I here lay before you, as you would that of any other historical

historical facts, such as those which prove the divine mission of Moses, and consider whether it be not equally clear and satisfactory. And if Jesus, after declaring that he came from God, and after resting the proof of his divine mission in a more especial manner on his own resurrection from the dead, did actually rise from the dead, to the compleat satisfaction of a sufficient number of the most competent witnesses, you must acknowledge that he was no impostor, and that whatever he declared as from God may be depended upon, as much as that which Moses delivered in his name.

Do not content yourselves, as I perceive you are apt to do, with an admiration of your laws, as delivered down to you from your forefathers, and with your obligation, as their descendants, to observe them; but carefully review the *history* of your ancestors, and of your laws, and consider the *reasons* they had to believe that they came from God. Your sacred books tell you, and I doubt not they tell you truly, that your fathers themselves, besides seeing the miracles of Moses, passed through the Red sea, which was divided in a miraculous manner for them, and then heard the ten commandments delivered in an audible voice from Mount Sinai. But do you consider the *authority* of those books, and the reasons why you receive them as authentic histories of past events, and then compare this evidence with that which christians alledge for the authority of the books of the New Testament. And if the facts there recorded be true, if Jesus was declared to be the son of God by an audible voice

voice from heaven; if, like Moses he wrought real miracles, or did such things as ~~no~~^{no} man could have done if God had not been with him; if, after being put to death in the most public manner, God raised him from the dead, and, in the sight of numbers of his followers, took him up into heaven, his divine mission can no more be questioned than that of Moses.

Believing this, you ought to declare yourselves christians, though without ceasing to be Jews, or discontinuing any of the observances of your own law, which Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil, and to confirm; having solemnly declared (Mat. 5. xviii.) that "till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

If Jesus was a true prophet, he must likewise be *the Messiah*, whom Daniel expressly says was to be *cut off*, though under a prince of the house of David (whom, if you please, you may call another Messiah, or a person anointed of God for a great purpose respecting your nation) you will be restored to your own country, and become the most distinguished people upon earth.

What then can be your great objection to receiving one more prophet of your own nation than you have hitherto done, and consequently complying with all his injunctions, one of which is to be baptized, in token of your new profession, and another to celebrate the Lord's supper, as you do the passover.

Do not wonder that God should require thus much of you by Christ, when he required so much more by Moses, though he made no such addition to your observances by any of the intermediate prophets. Christ was the most distinguished prophet that your nation ever produced; as by him God revealed to mankind in a more satisfactory manner than, as far as appears, he had ever done before, the great doctrine of a resurrection to a future immortal life; and as by his means the gentile world was brought to the knowledge and worship of the God of your fathers, so as to make a new dispensation, and a most distinguished æra in the religious history of the world. This great object you see is in a great measure effected, and it would have been compleatly so long ago, if the corruptions of christianity, and especially the introduction of the idolatrous worship of Jesus Christ, and other human beings, had not put a stop to it. But when this great abomination shall be removed, as there can be no doubt that it soon will be, christianity will resume its pristine vigour, and enlighten and bless the whole world; when you will be no longer able to charge christians with *idolatry*, but, as your prophets say, when *God will be one, and his name one.*

I am happy to find that you think it a considerable advantage to you that so great a part of the world is christian, rather than heathen, and that you live among people who respect your scriptures as much as you do yourselves. This advantage

vantage you would not have had among the Mahometans, who, though they allow the inspiration of your prophets, as well as that of Jesus Christ, think that all former revelations were superseded by their prophet Mahomet; so that they make no use of your scriptures or ours, but treat these sacred books with great contempt. In time, I doubt not, you will find yourselves still more indebted to christians than you have hitherto been, and that the unspeakable obligations we are under to you will be repaid by our services, in your conversion to christianity. We owe you much indeed, but we live in the hope of discharging the debt. In the mean time we must content ourselves with shewing our gratitude and good-will; reflecting on the important articles in which we agree with you, and which we derived from you.

The great object of our worship, and all the great articles of our faith, will then be the same. We agree in the belief of one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that this God is gracious and merciful to all the truly penitent, as no doubt he will be to you, when you shall turn to him with your whole hearts. "Believe
" in the Lord your God, so shall you be estab-
" lished, believe his prophets, so shall you prosper.
2 Chron. xx. 20. Moses, speaking of your present calamitous state, dispersed among all the nations of the world, says, Deut. iv. 29. "But
" if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy
" God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with
" all

“all thy heart, and with all thy soul. When thou
“art in tribulation and all these things” (viz. the
curses he had mentioned) “are come upon thee,
“even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy
“God, and be obedient to his voice (for the Lord
“thy God is a merciful God) he will not forsake
“thee, neither destroy thee, neither forget the cove-
“nant of thy fathers, which he sware unto thee.”

This God of your fathers seems now to be preparing the way, in the course of his unsearchable providence, for your restoration to his favour, and to your own country. Let nothing be wanting on your part to render yourselves the proper objects of such great favour. Of all nations you alone have been distinguished by a particular providence, so that your outward prosperity has ever kept pace with your faith and obedience; and this I doubt not will be the case to the end of time.

All your persecutions have arisen from *trinitarian*, i. e. *idolatrous* christians, but all *unitarians* will naturally love and respect you, acknowledging their unspeakable obligations to you, as the antient depositories of the great article of their faith. As one of them, and second to none in love and respect for you, I entreat your attention to this discourse; and with my earnest prayers for your happiness, temporal and eternal, I subscribe myself, as before,

Your brother in the sole worship of the
one living and true God,
Birmingham,
May 20, 1791. J. PRIESTLEY.

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BUT NOW IS CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND BECOME
THE FIRST FRUITS OF THEM THAT SLEPT.

I Cor. xv. 20.

WE cannot imagine any question more interesting to man, than whether he shall survive the grave, so that he shall live, and especially live for ever, after he has been dead. Every question relating to our condition *here* is of no moment at all when compared to this.

Nothing that we see in nature can lead us to form any such expectation. I say *expectation*. For though some appearances may lead us to indulge a *wish*, and in some persons perhaps encourage a *hope*, of another life after this, yet if we were left to the mere light of nature, it would remain improbable upon the whole;

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so

so that we could not, in this situation, die with any reasonable prospect of living again.

The constitution of man very much resembles that of other animals. They have the same senses of body, and the same faculties of mind, differing from us only in *degree*; man being more intelligent than they, and therefore capable of greater refinement in his passions and affections, and having greater comprehension of mind, so as to take into his view more of the past, and of the future, together with the present, than they can. This, however, amounts to no difference in *kind*; and the difference that we see among other animals in these respects, is as great as that which subsists between us and the highest of them; the oyster, for example, and the elephant. Consequently, it would be natural to conclude that one fate awaits us all, the superior kinds of animals as well as the inferior, and man as well as them all. When we die, we are equally subject to corruption, and a total dissolution of the parts of which we consist, without any appearance of their ever being re-assembled, and re-arranged as they were before, or of any other Being, in a new form,

form, resulting from them. Death is a great veil, which no man can draw aside, and beyond which all is darkness.

But were it possible, by the force of any reasoning, to discover the *probability* of a future state (and few persons will pretend that they can, by the light of nature, arrive at *certainty* with respect to it) the reasons, whatever they were, that made so great an event probable to one, might give no satisfaction to another.

Besides, the magnitude of the question is such, and the interest we have in the solution of it is so great, that nothing but the strongest and clearest evidence could give general satisfaction with respect to it. Nothing less than a positive assurance from our Maker himself could answer this purpose. And this (which, if any thing could be said to require it, did so) revelation informs us has been given, and in such a manner as must give entire satisfaction to every unprejudiced mind, *life and immortality being fully brought to light by the gospel*, as I hope to evince in the prosecution of this discourse.

It could not be expected that the Divine Being should give this assurance to every individual of the human race. It would be sufficient if it was given to some, to be communicated, with proper evidence of the fact, to others; and unless the communication was made to every person, this is all that could be done in the case. For this truth is of such a nature as to be incapable of strict, or mathematical, demonstration, such as that of *twice two making four*, but only of such proof as *historical facts* are capable of. But the evidence of a future state should not be undervalued on that account; because there are no kinds of truth of which we have a more firm persuasion than of those of the historical kind; as for example, that such a person as Julius Cæsar once lived at Rome, and that there exists at present such a city as Constantinople. What propositions do we believe more firmly than we do these? Now if our faith in a future life can be shewn to be as well founded as these are, it is quite sufficient for the purpose; because it will be a faith that men will not scruple to *act* upon. They would then live as expectants of immortality, and would
do

do nothing that should imply a doubt of a future state. That is, they would lead virtuous lives, which is the end of all religion.

In what manner God was pleased to impart to mankind the first information concerning a future life we are not now acquainted, as we have no account of it in the writings of Moses, or in any other writings now extant. But we see the *effect* of it in the Jews, who to this day are all firm believers in it; and, with a few exceptions, appear always to have believed in it. We may, therefore, presume that, in some period of time past, mankind, or at least the ancestors of that nation, had satisfactory evidence of the Divine Being having given them this assurance. Because it is an idea that we cannot well suppose would ever have occurred to men themselves.

That there may be something in man that continues to exist, notwithstanding the change that takes place in him at death, *may* be imagined. But, upon that principle, man cannot be said properly to *die* at all. He only continues to exist in some other form or manner. But that man should really *die*, and after continuing in a state of death, come to life again at a future period, that is, that

there should be a proper *resurrection of the dead*, which is the faith of the Jews, and Christians (being, I must now presume, the clear doctrine of both the Old and the New Testament) I will venture to say must ever have appeared in the highest degree improbable, and therefore incredible. Nothing but the express assurance of the great Being who made men could have satisfied them that he would revive them in those circumstances.

The original record of the communication of this most important truth having been lost, it pleased the Divine Being to renew it by Jesus Christ, the founder of our religion; who not only asserted the doctrine, as from God, and confirmed it by miracles, or such works as no man could have done if God had not been with him; but who himself actually died and rose again, as a proof of the reality of the thing. And this seems to have been all the evidence that mankind could have asked, if the most intelligent, and the most incredulous of them, had been required to say what would satisfy them.

As Jesus rested the evidence of his divine mission, and consequently his authority to preach the doctrine of a future life, in a more particular

particular manner upon his own resurrection from the dead ; and as, in all cases, examples have the greatest weight with mankind, I shall confine myself at this time to the consideration of the circumstances of his death and resurrection, shewing them to have been such as render those important events in the highest degree credible, both at the time when they took place ; and, which is of much more consequence, in all future time. So that, had mankind, not only in that period, but in the most distant ages, been required to name the evidence that would give them the most satisfaction, it will appear that it has been given them ; and that, in any other circumstances than the actual ones, the events would have appeared less credible than they do at present.

In the first place, however, I would briefly premise, that Jesus Christ was not only an uncommon man, but an uncommon prophet, the circumstances in which he appeared having been calculated to excite greater attention to him than to any other person who had ever appeared in that character ; his coming having been announced some centuries before his birth ; another prophet having been commissioned to declare his more immediate appearance,

pearance, and no other prophet having appeared for near four hundred years before his immediate predecessor.

This circumstance alone, independently of any others, shews that the Jews, among whom Jesus appeared, were not a credulous nation. For if this had been the case, as they are well known to have been very proud of having had prophets among them, there would have been, in so long a period, many false pretensions to prophecy; whereas in all that time there does not appear to have been any pretension of this kind. Nay the whole history of the Jews shews that, if any nation was to have been chosen for a theatre of prophecy, none could have been so proper for the purpose as that of the Jews; because they appear to have been the least credulous, more disposed to reject, than eagerly to receive, any prophets that were sent to them, Moses himself, the great pride of their nation, least of all excepted. They were ever fond of the ceremonies and religious rites of their neighbours, but always ready to reject their own, till repeatedly brought back to the observance of them by the severest judgments.

Besides,

Besides, though a great prophet, under the denomination of *the Messiah*, was expected by the body of the Jewish nation, the idea they had universally conceived of him was such, that, though Jesus truly bore that character, he was, in fact, such a person as they were least likely to receive in it. Their idea of the Messiah was that of *a king*, and a *conqueror*, to which Jesus made no pretensions. Nothing, therefore, but the most overbearing evidence could be expected to induce any Jew to receive in that character one who disclaimed all worldly honours, and who left his nation in the abject condition in which he found it. I will venture to say we have no example in history of any national prejudice so deeply rooted as this among the Jews, of their Messiah being to be a temporal prince, destined to rescue their nation from servitude, and to make them the most distinguished people upon the face of the earth. It is found among all the Jews, in all parts of the world, to this very day. No time, or calamities, seem capable of extinguishing it. Evidence, therefore, that could subdue such a prejudice as this, in any considerable number of *Jews*, must have been of the most satisfactory kind.

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In this nation did Jesus appear, after being announced by John the Baptist, who, to draw the more attention upon him, solemnly baptized those who received his doctrine, the chief article of which was the speedy approach of another prophet much greater than himself. An audible voice from heaven was the token by which John knew that Jesus was the person whom he was sent to precede, for they had no previous knowledge of each other. Accordingly, John referred all his disciples to Jesus, thereby transferring to him, as far as it was in his power, all the popularity that he himself had acquired, which appears to have been very great with the nation in general. This, I would observe by the way, sufficiently proves that John was no impostor, or one who sought any thing for himself.

Jesus, thus announced, preached publicly, working numberless miracles, the reality of which was never called in question, especially healing all manner of diseases, and raising at least three persons, but probably more, from the dead. But the morality which he taught was so strict, and his appearance so unassuming, that the generality of his countrymen would not receive him in the character of
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their promised Messiah. Many, however, who attended him more closely, had no doubt of this. But even these persons were so fixed in the popular belief that the Messiah was to be a king, that they were persuaded he only waited a proper opportunity to assume that character; and when he was put to death without doing it, all their hopes were disappointed, and they evidently had no farther expectations from him, notwithstanding they never entertained the idea of his being an impostor.

While Jesus lived, his followers were numerous, and twelve of them constantly attended him, so that his person could not but have been perfectly well known to them, and to these he repeatedly appeared after his death, so as finally to leave no doubt on any of their minds, that he was the same person who had been put to death.

I shall now dwell a little on those circumstances which tend to give peculiar strength to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, and reply to some objections which have been made to it. After this I shall shew that this historical evidence of the truth of
revealed

revealed religion proves the truth of *natural religion*, and conclude with a practical application of the doctrine.

In the first place I shall consider the circumstances which give peculiar strength to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

1. His death was not private, among his friends, but in public, and accomplished by his enemies, who, we may be sure, would not leave their own great purpose unfinished, when it was in their power completely to effect it. This we cannot doubt to have been the principal reason, in the plan of divine providence, why Jesus was executed as a criminal, in consequence of the sentence of a public court of justice. After this, no reasonable doubt could be entertained of the reality of his death. Accordingly, it does not appear that any doubt was entertained of it at the time, by those who were the best judges, and who were, at the same time, the most interested to dispute the fact. And this is all that we can reasonably require at this day.

It is true that Jesus expired sooner than other persons usually did in the same circumstances. But this might be owing to his
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having a more delicate constitution, but especially to his having been so much exhausted by his severe agony in the garden the preceding night; an agony which affected him so much that it would not have been extraordinary if he had actually died in consequence of it: since such consternation and terror as he appears to have been in is well known to have been, of itself, the cause of death to many persons.

The death of Jesus was so evident to the soldiers who attended the execution, and who, no doubt (being used to the business) were sufficient judges of the signs of death, that, concluding him to be actually dead, they did not break his bones, as they did those of the other persons who were executed along with him. One of them, however, did what was fully equivalent to it; for he thrust a spear into his side, so that blood and water evidently flowed out of the wound. Now though we may be at a loss to account for the *water*, it was certainly impossible so to pierce the body as that *blood* should visibly and instantly flow from the wound, without piercing either the heart itself, or some large blood vessel, the rupture of which would have been mortal.

After

After this, Jesus was taken down from the cross, was swathed in spices, as the bodies of persons of distinction among the Jews usually were, was left in that state, without any appearance of life, deposited in a cold sepulchre, where he could have no assistance to bring him to life if any remains of life had been in him. Can we then have any doubt of Jesus having been unquestionably dead, when both friends and enemies had no doubt at the time on the subject.

2. The circumstances of the re-appearing of Jesus after his crucifixion were such, as were calculated to give the greatest satisfaction possible. The first of them were made when, it is evident, his disciples had no expectation whatever of any such event, so that they could not have been imposed upon by their fond imaginations. For though Jesus had plainly apprized his disciples that he was to be put to death, and that he should rise again on the third day, they had so fixed a persuasion that he was to be a great king, and consequently not to die at all, that they probably concluded (as he had been used to speak to them in figurative language) that by *death* he only meant

meant some trial, or calamity, and that therefore by a *resurrection* he meant his emerging from it. But whatever their ideas were, it is most evident from the history that they had no expectation either of his death, or of his resurrection, and that his death only filled them with consternation and despair, and did not at all lead them to expect his resurrection.

After Jesus had appeared in this unexpected manner to several of his disciples, viz. to Mary Magdalene, to the two disciples walking to Emmaus, to the ten who were assembled in the evening of the same day at Jerusalem, and probably to Peter also, he appointed a time and place when he would meet them all, at a sufficient distance from the time of his speaking. Consequently, if any doubts remained on the minds of any of them, they had time to consider what satisfaction they required, and might, of course, be prepared to get that satisfaction, which it is evident he never refused them, even offering himself to be handled, and examined by them at their leisure, and eating and drinking along with them. Indeed the marks of crucifixion on his

his hands and feet, and the wound in his side, were abundantly sufficient to identify his person. What is recorded concerning Thomas was probably the case of many others; nor did his incredulity exceed that of the rest, though he expressed it in a stronger manner; and the satisfaction that Jesus gave to Thomas, he was, no doubt, as ready to give to any others of them.

3. The appearances were sufficiently frequent, viz. four times on the day of resurrection, first to Mary Magdalene, then to Peter, then to the two disciples walking to Emmaus, then to the Ten in the absence of Thomas, and afterwards to all the Eleven. In Galilee he first appeared unexpectedly to Peter, John, and a few others, and then to more than five hundred at once. This must have been the great meeting by appointment, though particularly mentioned by Paul only. Another time he appeared to James, called his brother, or near relation, then to all the disciples (who were more than an hundred) residing at Jerusalem, when he went with them to the mount of Olives, and at leisure ascended above the clouds in their sight.

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Though these are all the appearances that are particularly recorded, there were probably many more, for no one writer has mentioned all these, not even Paul, who seems to have intended to recite all that he could recollect at that time. None of these appearances, I would also observe, were at midnight, when persons, suddenly awaking from sleep, have not the perfect use of their senses and judgment; but in the day; not at a distance, but quite near; and not transient, but of a sufficient length of time.

Surely, then, we are authorized to say that, as far as *numbers* were requisite to give evidence concerning any particular event, these were quite sufficient. For if the evidence of five hundred would not remove the doubts of any persons, neither would that of five thousand, or of any number whatever. They were also persons who had every character of unexceptionable witnesses, as they cannot be supposed to have been deceived themselves, or to have had any motive to wish to impose upon others; because they had no interest in doing it.

4. The appearances were continued to a sufficient period, viz. the space of forty days, which was certainly time enough for any persons to recollect themselves, to get over any impression of surprize, and to be perfectly collected, so as to be put upon their guard against any cause of deception, and to examine and satisfy themselves at their full leisure.

Such is the direct evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, than which nothing can well be conceived to be stronger, resting upon the testimony of a sufficient number of the most competent witnesses, not prepossessed in favour of an *expected* event, and who yet had time to recover from the surprize occasioned by an *unexpected* one. It was also a testimony to which they all adhered through life, notwithstanding the greatest temptation that men could lie under to tell a different story.

I shall now consider some objections that have been made to this evidence.

1. It has been said that Jesus ought to have continued longer in a state of death, as till the body had putrified, &c. so that the revival of it might have been the more extraordinary.

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In this view, no doubt, the evidence of a proper resurrection might have been made more striking. But then, though the evidence would have gained strength in one way, it would, by this very means, have lost much more in another. Not to say that a resurrection from any state of unquestionable death, is as much a proof of a real miracle, as from any other state. That is, it required nothing less than a *divine power*, which is undoubtedly equal to the raising a man from death at any period, as well as the making of any number of new men.

But had the resurrection of Jesus been at any considerable distance of time, the evidence of his *death*, and consequently that of a miracle in his *resurrection*, had not been so clear. For then it might have been said that, in so long time, he might have recovered from the effect of a seeming death; that his disciples had time to recover from their consternation, and lay their schemes for any particular purpose; that, in so long an interval, the guard of the sepulchre might have been more negligently kept, the seal on the stone might have been broken by some accident, and Jesus, being alive, might

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have been conveyed away, and time given for his appearance, as raised from the dead.

But considering that Jesus was taken down from the cross, to all appearance at least dead, and left in the state of a corpse, swathed in spices, late on Friday evening, and then left alone, in a cold sepulchre, it was absolutely impossible, whatever life may be supposed to have remained in him, that he should have appeared not only alive, but in perfect health and vigour, walking about, and conversing, as if nothing at all had been done to him, so early as at day break on the Sunday following. In the evening of that day he walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus, which was about eight miles, and also back again, and as speedily as two men in health, and who made all the haste they could, were able to do the same. This is the more extraordinary, considering the wounds that had been made in the *feet* of Jesus. If a man had suffered nothing more than this piercing of his feet, in the rough manner in which it was, no doubt, done in the act of crucifixion, this walk alone would have been absolutely impossible; and on the third day he would have been even less able to walk

walk than on the first, from the inflammation of the wounds. There must, therefore, have been some miracle in the case; and if any miracle was performed, why not that of a real resurrection?

It may be said that the evidence of a real miracle would have been still stronger, if the bones of Jesus had been broken, like those of the two thieves. But as the piercing of his feet, the wound in his side, and even the hanging so long on the cross, must have effectually incapacitated him from walking abroad within two days, the breaking of his bones would have made no real addition to the evidence; the *impossibility* of his walking abroad being really the same in both cases. There would have been a difference only in the case of *probabilities*, which vary with circumstances. But any one natural and absolute *impossibility* furnishes as strong an argument as another.

In this very important view, therefore, the less was the time that intervened between Jesus' having been laid in the sepulchre, and his appearance alive and well out of it, the stronger is the evidence of a divine interposition, and unbelievers would have had more to

object if that interval had been longer, than they can have at present. Jesus, we can now say, appeared alive and well sooner than it was *possible*, in the ordinary course of nature, that he could have done. It was before the guard could have been relaxed, before the disciples could have recovered from their consternation; and especially before it was possible for him to have recovered from the languishing state in which crucifixion must have left any man; to say nothing of the wound he had received in his side, which alone, if it had missed any vital part, must have confined him, and have disabled him from going abroad, a very long time.

2. It may be proper to take some notice of the story that was propagated by the Jewish priests, who, when the guard fled at the appearance of the angel and the earthquake, bade them say that *the disciples of Jesus came by night, and stole him away while they slept*. This, however, was both in the highest degree improbable, and what is more, it would not have answered any purpose; so that they who had just before behaved in the most cowardly manner possible, must have risked their lives for

for nothing. Indeed, such a story as this would hardly have been suggested by the enemies of christianity, if any thing had been known at the time besides the earthquake, the appearance of the angel, and a suspicion, perhaps a report, of the absence of the body, and if any thing had occurred to them more plausible at the time. So weak a defence almost amounts to a confession of the weakness of the cause to be supported by it.

The improbability alone of any considerable number of men all sleeping, whose business it was to keep awake, and not more than two or three hours, for which they had time enough to prepare themselves by sleeping the preceding part of the night (for this was the last watch, at break of day) and when the penalty of sleeping was death; and that they should all sleep so soundly, as that the rolling of a large stone (so large that several women despaired of being able to move it) and this quite near to them, should not awake any one of them, is far too great to be admitted.

The disciples of Jesus, if such a scheme had come into their minds, dispirited and dispersed as they were, could have had no expectation

pectation of accomplishing of it *undiscovered*, even if there had been no guard at the sepulchre. The city of Jerusalem was at that time full of people, beyond any thing that we can have an idea of at present, being the time of passover, and when the moon was at the full, so that numbers of people (the houses of the city not being sufficient to receive them) would be walking about at all hours; and the sepulchre was so near to the city, that it is now inclosed within the walls. In that climate, and that time of the year, there was no inconvenience in passing the whole night, and even sleeping in the open air. The preceding night Jesus and his disciples had passed in a neighbouring garden; and it is very probable that they had done the same before, since Judas expected to find them there. In these circumstances, the disciples could not have had any reasonable expectation of removing the body undiscovered.

Besides, what would the removal of a mere corpse, admitting that they might have had the courage, and address, to succeed in so unpromising an attempt, have availed them. There would have been no evidence of a *resurrection*,

urrection, unless the dead man could have been exhibited alive, which it was certainly out of their power to do.

If a few of the disciples of Jesus had been so abandoned, and at the same time so stupid, as to have attempted an imposition of this kind, an imposition from which they could not have derived any imaginable advantage, how could they have made others believe a resurrection of which they saw no evidence? Would the mere absence of the body have satisfied Thomas (who, though one of the twelve, was certainly not in the secret) the five hundred who went by appointment into Galilee, or the thousands who were converted by Peter immediately after this event; and would none of them have abandoned so groundless a faith in time of persecution? Would not torture, and the prospect of death, have extorted a confession of the cheat from some of those who were in the secret.

Lastly, what prospect could the disciples of Jesus have had of being able to carry on the scheme that was begun by their master, without his power of working miracles, of which they must have known themselves to be destitute. It was, no doubt, the possession
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of this power, and this alone, that emboldened them, disappointed and dispirited as they had been before, to persist in the same scheme, and without this they would certainly have absconded, and have been no more heard of. They were neither orators, nor warriors, and therefore were destitute of all the natural means of success.

3. The objection that has been urged in the strongest manner, and to which I must, therefore, give the more particular attention, is, that, after his resurrection, Jesus should have appeared as publicly as he had done before his death, and especially in the presence of his judges, and of his enemies. This, they say, would have satisfied them, and the whole country, and of course all the world, so that no doubt would have remained on the subject.

But the resurrection of Jesus himself might not have conciliated those who were only the more exasperated at the resurrection of Lazarus, at which themselves were present, from whatever source their obstinacy and incredulity arose. The whole story, how well soever attested, might have been laughed at in Greece and at Rome, where the Jews and every thing relating to them, were, without
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any examination into the subject, held in the greatest contempt. Besides, there would have been a want of dignity, and an appearance of insult, unworthy of our Saviour's character, in thus ostentatiously exhibiting himself before his enemies, and as it were mocking at their attempts to kill him.

I would farther observe, that though Jesus did not appear to *all* his enemies, he did appear to *one* of them, and one whom no person will doubt to have been as prejudiced, and as inveterate, as any of them, viz. Paul. Now, as *this* enemy of christianity was convinced of the truth of the resurrection, by Jesus appearing to him in person, we cannot doubt but that, if it had suited the plan of divine providence, *all* the Jews might have been convinced by the same means, and have become christians.

But admitting that the consequence of such a public appearance of Jesus would have been the conviction of all that country, and of all that age, it would have been an unfavourable circumstance with respect to the evidence at this distance of time, and still more so in remoter ages. And the great object certainly was,

was, that this important event should be so circumstanced, as that it should preserve its credit unimpaired to the end of time.

If we suppose that mankind in the most distant ages of the world had been asked, What kind of evidence would satisfy *them*, with respect to the reality of an event which took place several thousand years before they were born, they would certainly say; that, to give satisfaction to *them* who had no opportunity of examining into the fact themselves, it should have been so circumstanced, as that besides a sufficient number of persons attesting the truth of it, friends and enemies, believers and unbelievers, should clearly appear to have been sufficiently *interested* to examine into the truth, while the fact was *recent*, and therefore while it was in their power to investigate it thoroughly. And this could only be in circumstances in which some should believe it and others not, and in which the believers should have every temptation to renounce their belief, and their enemies every motive to detect the imposture. But this could not have been the case if the resurrection of Jesus had been universally believed
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at the time, or in that age, and consequently there had been no early persecution of christians.

In these circumstances, it might have been said by unbelievers in remote ages, that, as no opposition was made to the progress of christianity, it did not appear to them that the reality of those facts on which the belief of it is founded had been sufficiently enquired into at the time, that it might have been found convenient (for reasons now unknown, and at this distance inscrutable) to make a change in the religion of the country; and that, as the rulers of it adopted the measure, it might, for any thing that appeared, have been originally a scheme of *theirs*; and that when the governors of any country interest themselves to promote any measure, it is always in their power to impose upon the vulgar; that private orders, for example, might have been given, that Jesus, though suspended on a cross, should not be much hurt; that the sepulchre, being under ground, might have proper apartments adjoining to it, where there might be every accommodation that was requisite for his complete recovery and refreshment;

ment; and that a few leading persons being in the secret, the rest might be imposed upon to believe the story of a resurrection, or any thing else.

Thus the origin of christianity, it might have been said, did not materially differ from that of the several species of heathenism or Mahometanism, which the people first believed without any proper enquiry, and to which their descendants adhered because they had been received by their ancestors before them.

But the circumstances attending the actual promulgation of christianity were such, as that nothing of this kind can ever be advanced by any unbelievers, at all acquainted with the history of the times; because it is evident, that Jesus Christ, and his religion, and especially the account of his resurrection, on which the whole of it hinged, immediately engaged the closest attention of great numbers, and that thousands felt themselves interested in the highest degree to examine into the truth of it.

In the first place, the apostles, and other primitive christians, were certainly interested
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not to give up their ease, their little fortunes, and their lives, for an idle tale. And, on the other hand, the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, who had been so much exasperated at Jesus as to procure his death, even with some risque to themselves, from his popularity with the common people, would feel themselves more strongly interested to suppress his followers, and his religion, after his death, and this they evidently did, without losing any time in the business.

Not more than fifty days elapsed between the crucifixion of Jesus and the most open publication of the account of his resurrection, an event spoken of even before his death, against any imposition with respect to which all possible precautions had been taken, and concerning which many rumours must have prevailed from the passover to pentecost (for no secrecy was enjoined with respect to it) from the very day of his appearance. On the day of Pentecost, however, it was boldly asserted by such a number of persons, who were witnesses of the fact, that some thousands (who had themselves seen the miracles of Jesus) were fully convinced of its truth,
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and gave public testimony of their faith by being immediately baptized.

Observe in how full and explicit a manner Peter, on this occasion, gave his testimony, Acts ii. 22. *Ye men of Israel, hear my words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him, in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all (and about one hundred and twenty were then with him) are witnesses.*

The boldness of the apostles in giving this public testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, a testimony which his audience evidently could not contradict, exasperated the rulers of the country to the highest degree; and the event being then recent, they would, no doubt, do every thing that men, and men in power, could do in order to discover the cheat, if any such had been used.

This endeavour to suppress christianity began in the very country, and in the very city, in which it was first promulgated, where Jesus had always appeared in public, and consequently

consequently where himself, and all that he had done, were known to thousands. And this violent opposition, than which we know of nothing in the history of mankind more violent, and which began as early as it was possible for it to begin, was continued by the Jews, with very few interruptions, till it was taken up by the Romans, who were alarmed at the rapid spread of the new religion, which soon appeared to be hostile to all the old ones, on the observance of which it was universally imagined that the temporal prosperity of states depended. And this persecution of christianity did not end till about three hundred years after its promulgation, that is, till all farther scrutiny into the facts was equally impossible and needless.

Did not this situation of things most strongly invite all persons to make the most rigorous inquiry into the truth of the facts on which christianity was founded, and especially that of the resurrection of Jesus? Would not all the five hundred as long as they lived (and according to Paul many of them were living in the year 52, and the apostle John, it is supposed, did not die till about A. D. 90)

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be continually speaking of it, and examined concerning it. This would certainly be the case if any such event had happened at this day, and human nature, we cannot doubt to have been the same in all ages.

What, then, could any of those who are now unbelievers in christianity have done, if they had been living at the time of the promulgation of it, more than other unbelievers then did, who, whatever else they might do, or say, could not discover any marks of imposture. No other facts in the whole compass of history, we may safely venture to assert, ever underwent a thousandth part of the investigation that, from the nature of the circumstances, *these* must have done; and, what is of particular consequence, at the time when the investigation was the most easy.

Though Jesus did not appear in public after his resurrection, the miracle of *the descent of the holy Spirit*, enabling the apostles and other disciples to speak intelligibly languages which they had not been taught, and also many other miracles wrought by them, were as public as possible; and every miracle wrought by the apostles was, in fact, a proof of the resurrection

rection of their master. If his mission, confirmed by, and implying the truth of, his resurrection, was not from God, neither was theirs; for both were part of the same scheme, and therefore they imply one another.

Thus our faith does not rest on the testimony of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who wrote the history of Christ, and of the promulgation of christianity. We have, in fact, the testimony of the age in which they lived, to the great events recorded by them. These books, or ever so many of the same nature, could never have been received, and transmitted to us, as authentic histories, in the circumstances that I have described, if the contents of them could have been questioned.

The inconsistencies that we discover in the accounts of the four evangelists imply no defect in the evidence; being no greater than are usually found in the narratives of any important event written by different persons; who will always attend chiefly to what is most essential to the story, and less to the minute circumstances of it; and these narratives were all written a considerable time after the event.

But the most important consideration is, that these histories were not the cause of the belief of the resurrection of Jesus, but were themselves among the consequences of that belief, the proper evidence having produced its full effect long before they were written; so that it could not have been deficient in any material respect.

That all mankind were not immediately convinced of the truth of christianity may be sufficiently accounted for; as, from the little interest that great numbers take in any thing relating to *religion*; from the aversion which the greatest part of mankind have to examine into any thing that is *new*, when it is hostile to that which is *old*, and their listening to any idle tales to the prejudice of those who teach it, which we see every day. And if the powerful, the learned, and the polite, whose prejudices, especially against any thing that originates with the *illiterate*, are well known to be as strong as any prejudices whatever, would not read or think seriously on the subject (which was evidently the case with the generality of the Greek and Roman philosophers, and other persons of distinction at that time) many
would

would be influenced by their example, and join in a blind opposition to what they had never considered, from imagining that it was not worth their while to consider it.

Besides all this, we are to consider the great numbers who were, directly or indirectly, interested in the support of the old established systems of religion, who would feel themselves exasperated, and, therefore without any inquiry into the merits of the case, would, with all their might, oppose the progress of the new religion. Such would be the case with many persons of eminence and influence; and the lower orders, the mob, might be inflamed by any idle tales. This is nothing more than the common fate of all reformers, and all reformations in matters of religion. It flows from the common principles of human nature, which are the same in all ages, and which operate in the same manner in all similar circumstances.

In this state things continued as long as they possibly could, the friends and the enemies of christianity being equally interested to discover the truth, while the facts were at all recent, and most easy to be investigated;

and the new religion established itself gradually, as, if founded on truth, and unaided by power, it naturally would do in such circumstances. The attention of the more dispassionate and disinterested was gradually gained, and converts were in time made of some men of learning, who were capable of writing in defence of christianity, and whose writings made other converts, both philosophers and others.

At length the converts to christianity in all places, and especially in those that were the nearest to the scene of the transactions, were so numerous, that the old religion sunk into general contempt and neglect; and in less than three hundred years after the promulgation of christianity, we see that, notwithstanding the deep-rooted attachment of all the heathen world to the religion of their ancestors, Constantine could safely declare himself a christian, without any apprehension from his competitors, who endeavoured to avail themselves of that circumstance. None of them, however, were able, by this means, to throw any considerable obstacle in his way, and he reigned almost in peace, and a longer

longer time than any of the emperors after Augustus.

This is a clear proof of the preceding spread of christianity, and of the hold which it had got on the minds of the people in general; and this was in the most disadvantageous circumstances that can be imagined, if it had been an imposture. But this most striking evidence of the truth of christianity we could not now have had, if the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus had been such, as to have convinced all the Jews and all the world as soon as he appeared. What had been the most satisfactory to *them* would have been (from the nature of the thing) the least so to *us*.

When the persecution of christianity began, the facts on which it was founded were recent, so that it was in the power of men of sense and inquiry to satisfy themselves concerning them; and we have seen that they were sufficiently interested so to do. But if one whole generation should have been, as we say, *infatuated*, so as to have taken up the belief of these facts without any sufficient reason, the next generation might have been

sensible of this, and have made more diligent search (and then it was not too late) and not have thrown away their fortunes and their lives for nothing, as their fathers had done before them. But notwithstanding this, every inquiry continued to make more converts, till, without any aid from power, or from learning in the first instance, the new religion completely established itself on the ruins of the old, and was embraced by persons of all ranks without distinction, the rich and the poor, the philosophers and the vulgar.

If all this could take place without there being any truth in the history of the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, it must have been more extraordinary, nay, strictly speaking, more miraculous, than those events themselves. For human nature was the same then that it is now; and that *men*, such as we now find them to be, should, in the circumstances that I have now described, have been impressed as the early converts to christianity were, that they should have been induced to believe a story which they might easily have discovered to be destitute of all foundation, and have sacrificed so much as they did

did to their belief, must have been the greatest of all miracles; no natural cause being adequate to such an effect. It must also have been so stupendous a miracle (operating on *the minds of men*, which is more extraordinary than any effect that is apparent to the senses) without any rational end or object. Nay the Divine Being must have wrought this miracle with no other view than to puzzle and confound his creatures, and to involve some of the most deserving of them in the greatest calamities. On the other hand, the miracles which gave birth to christianity had the greatest and noblest of all objects, the instruction and reformation of the world. In fact, the proof of christianity supplies the only probable method of accounting for past and present *appearances*, and therefore what a true *philosopher*, whose object it is to inquire into the *causes of things*, will adopt, in preference to any other.

It was, however, you clearly see, of the greatest advantage to the evidence of the truth of christianity in distant ages, that the bulk of the Jewish nation should from the beginning have been hostile to it; while at
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the same time the belief of such numbers of them, prejudiced as they must all have been against it, is an abundant proof of its truth. But when, by the long continued enmity of the Jews to the christians, it shall be sufficiently evident, that it was no scheme of that nation in general, and that, so far from giving it any aid in its infant state, they discounted it as much as it was in their power to do it; if ever they should be converted to christianity, before or after their return to their own country (both which events are foretold in the scriptures) it will be such a clear fulfilment of prophecy, as it seems probable that no power of incredulity will be able to resist; and then, as Paul says, Rom. xi. 15. *If the casting away of the Jews be the reconciling of the world, what shall receiving of them be, but life from the dead?*

I shall conclude this part of my discourse with observing, that the truth of christianity is founded upon plain *facts*, such as any persons who had the use of their senses might be judges of. Opinions of other kinds men may become so fully persuaded of, as even to die for them, as well as christians have done
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for their religion; but then the *nature* and *ground* of their faith have been different; they having been either misled by an *implicit faith* in persons who they thought could not mislead them, or by *reasoning wrong*. That Mahomet, for example, or Swedenborg, had divine missions, many might be induced to believe on their own confident assertions, having a good opinion of the men; or they might imagine that the conquests of Mahomet and his followers, could not have been so great and so rapid, if his pretensions had not been well founded. But is this such *kind* of evidence as that on which we believe the truth of christianity, which neither requires that implicit faith be given to any person, nor any reasoning, except the plainest of all, viz. that if any person do such works as God only could enable him to do, he must be empowered by God to do them, and the evidence of their own senses that such works were done? The truth of christianity rests on the evidence of such visible marks of divine power as the instant curing of the most dangerous disorders, and the raising of persons, and especially of Jesus himself, from a state of actual

actual death, with respect to which men who had only eyes, ears, and other natural senses, could not possibly be deceived; whereas no visible miracle of any kind was so much as pretended to by either Mahomet or Swedenborg.

We also see the great difference of the ground of belief in these cases in the *time* that was requisite to produce their effect. Mahomet was several years in persuading any besides a very few persons, particularly connected with him, and who had a prospect of being gainers by his success, of his divine mission, and it was thirteen years before he had followers enow to venture to take the field with them, so as to attack a caravan, to which they were led by the hope of plunder. As to Swedenborg, though he died several years ago, his followers are only just now beginning to make themselves conspicuous. On the contrary, it is evident that Jesus might, if he had been so disposed, have mustered as large an army as he chose within a month or two after he appeared in a public character.

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Some are so incredulous as to say, that, admitting all the facts recited in the gospel history, viz. that the apostles, and other disciples of Jesus, had no doubt of his resurrection, and that their previous incredulity was overcome by the most satisfactory evidence; yet that it was more probable that their senses, that of feeling, as well as those of seeing and hearing, were repeatedly imposed upon, than that there should have been a proper resurrection of a man who had been dead. But such a deception as this could not have been effected without a miracle; and for what end could such a miracle have been wrought? As it had all the effect of a real resurrection, it is liable to all the same objections, and therefore if the one was produced, the other might be also.

If any person will say either that the appearances recorded in the New Testament are no proofs of a real resurrection, or (which has also been said) that the real resurrection of Jesus would be no proof of his divine mission, and of the truth of his religion, so that we could not thence infer the certainty of our own resurrection, they must be so constituted,

stituted, as that no evidence whatever ^{can} ~~any~~ produce that conviction in their minds. The Divine Being himself (and I must in this argument suppose that there is such a Being) could not do it. For all that *he* could do to attest the divine mission of any person could only be his enabling him to work miracles, or to do such things as only he himself, the author of nature, could do. But no person, in the age of the apostles, or any subsequent one, ever believed the facts, and doubted the conclusion; so that the miracles were fully adequate to the purpose of them; and since all men are no doubt constituted alike, the present objectors must be under the influence of a prejudice that nothing can overcome, and must be a case exactly similar to insanity.

I now proceed to shew that the solution of such difficulties as these, respecting the truth of *revealed religion*, may assist those who have similar difficulties with respect to *natural religion*; and all great moral truths have, directly or indirectly, a connection with each other.

Now it seems to be impossible for any person to be convinced by historical evidence, which

which is the most intelligible of all evidence whatever, of the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ, and at the same time to have any doubt of the being and the providence of God, because the one evidently implies the other. If Christ actually wrought miracles, and, after dying, rose from the dead, there must have been a *power* that enabled him so to do; and this must have been an intelligent, or a designing, and a benevolent power, the laws of nature having been changed for great and good purposes.

It is in vain for any person to say, as some however have done, that till we are satisfied with respect to the being of a God, which, in the order of nature, is the first of all religious truths, it is to no purpose to inquire into the evidence of christianity. For though it be most convenient to *teach*, and to *consider*, any system of truths in a certain order, the *discovery* of them is altogether independent of that order. In this case, *the first may be last, and the last first*.

An Englishman, for example, may say, and plausibly enough, that he ought to understand his own country, before he explores

plores any other. But it may happen that he shall be carried to Asia, Africa, or America, before he can have seen much of his own country, and thereby have a better opportunity of exploring *them* than his own. Or, considering the sun as the centre of our system, he might fancy that, till we know what that great body is, it is absurd to give much attention to the *planets*, which depend upon it. But in this way he might live and die without acquiring any knowledge of them at all. Even the several propositions in geometry may be learned in a very different order, as the different treatises on that branch of science evince, and yet be all equally well understood at the last. In like manner may men attain to the knowledge of God, and of his providence without beginning with the study of them.

An atheist is a person who believes that there is no Being who established the present order of nature, but that all things have always been as they now are, and that all deviations from this order are absolutely impossible, and therefore incredible. Consequently, any clear proof of an actual deviation

viation from this order of nature overturns his whole system. The atheist says that, since we must suppose something to have been *uncaused*, we may just as well content ourselves with saying that the present visible system had no cause, as suppose that something still greater than this system, and the cause of it, had no cause; since by ascending higher, we get no nearer to the solution of our great difficulty, viz. the *cause of what exists*. But the proof of any miracle is decisively in favour of the actual existence of a power unquestionably above the common course of nature, and different from it. This is no less than a demonstration, that the reasoning of the atheist, however specious, is *in fact* wrong; and that, difficult as it may be to conceive the self-existence, as we say, of a Being greater than the visible universe, such a Being certainly does exist. I shall endeavour to make this argument still plainer by an illustration.

Let a person unacquainted with clocks, watches, and other machines, be introduced into a room containing many of them, all in regular motion. He sees no maker of these machines, and knows nothing of their internal
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structure; and as he sees them all to move with perfect regularity, he may say, on the principles of the atheistical system, that they are *automata*, or self-moving machines; and so long as all these machines continue in regular motion, and he knows nothing of the making of them, or the winding of them up, this theory may appear plausible.

But let us suppose that, coming into this room again and again, and, always attending to the machines, he shall find one of them much out of order, and at length its motion shall intirely cease; but that, after continuing in this state some time, he shall again find it in perfect order, moving as regularly as ever. Will he not then conclude that some person, whom he has not seen, but probably the maker of the machines, had been in the room in his absence? The restoration of motion to the disordered machine would impress his mind with the idea of a *maker* of them in a much more forcible manner than his observing the regular construction, and uniform motion of them. It must convince him of the existence of some person capable of *regulating*, and therefore probably of *making*, these

these machines, whether he should ever see this person or not.

Thus do miracles prove the existence of a God in a shorter and more satisfactory manner than the observation of the uninterrupted course of nature. If there be a Being who can *controul* the course of nature, there must be one who originally *established* it, in whatever difficulty we may still be left with respect to his nature, and the manner of his existence. We are compelled by a greater difficulty to admit a less, though acknowledged to be great. At all events, we see in miracles that there certainly exists a Being superior to ourselves, or any thing that is the object of our senses.

And thus is demonstrated the wisdom of the general plan of divine providence, in ordering that the laws of nature should not always proceed without interruption, but in providing that the attention of mankind should sometimes be arrested by miraculous events; since they are eminently calculated to lead the minds of men to the consideration of a superior Being, as the cause of all events, ordinary and extraordinary. Thus also is

evident the folly and ignorance of those who think all miraculous events to be so absurd, as to be in their own nature incredible, and therefore that no evidence in their favour can deserve the least attention. If the reverence of mankind for their maker be of any use, or of any consequence to their happiness, which undoubtedly it is, occasional miracles have the greatest propriety, and therefore great antecedent credibility, though all the particular facts require very circumstantial evidence, because they are not of frequent occurrence.

I now come to draw some practical inferences from the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus.

Such is the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus, exclusive of the general evidence of christianity, or of the miracles of Jesus, and those of the apostles after him, which are also another confirmation of the truth of this one great event. And, surely, it appears that the circumstances attending the resurrection of Jesus were so ordered by divine providence, that it is not in the power of man to imagine any change in them that, according to the known laws of evidence, would make it more credible than

than it is with respect to distant ages. Every objection that has hitherto been made to this evidence has led to a more rigorous examination of the circumstances; and the consequence of this has always been an addition of light upon the evidence, and a greater confirmation of it. We are therefore abundantly authorized to consider our faith as *founded upon a rock*, which no future objection will be able to shake.

Since, therefore, we may consider it as a certain and unquestionable fact, that *Christ is risen from the dead*, we may likewise, with the apostle, consider him as *the first fruits of them that sleep*, or that his resurrection is a pledge and assurance of our own, which it is the great object of christianity to enforce. Christ is called the *first fruits*, and these are the fore-runners of a general harvest. *Afterwards*, says the apostle, *they that are Christ's, at his coming*. For Christ has only left the present scene for a time. If there be any truth in the facts the evidence of which has now been laid before you, he will certainly come again, and that *with power and great glory*, to raise the dead, and to give unto every man according to his works.

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Let us, therefore, my christian brethren, be continually looking for this great event, this *great day of God*, as it is sometimes called. For to all of us it is *nigh, even at the doors*. Long as the sleep of death may really be, it will appear to each of us to be only a moment. In death we, as it were, only shut our eyes upon this world, and immediately open them in another, with the brightest and most glorious prospects, if our conversation has been such as becomes the gospel, but with the most gloomy and dreadful ones, if this great light *hath come into the world, and we have loved darkness rather than light, because our deeds were evil*.

The mere profession of christianity will avail us nothing, nay much less than nothing, because it lays us under stronger obligations to a virtuous life, and therefore will aggravate our condemnation if we do not live as, by ranking with christians, we profess to live. Better, far better, would it be for us, at the day of judgment, to be able to say we had never heard of Christ, than *naming the name of Christ*, or professing his religion, not to have been thereby led to *depart from iniquity*, and to be to him *a peculiar people zealous of good works*.

Christianity is much less to be considered as a system of doctrines, than as a rule of practice. Nay the doctrines themselves (the chief of which is that of a future state of retribution) have no other object than the regulation of our lives. What the great duties of the christian life are, we are all sufficiently acquainted with. They are comprehended in two great precepts, the first of which is the love of God with all our hearts, implying an entire and chearful devotedness to his will, in doing and in suffering, in life and in death. And the second is the loving of our neighbour as ourselves, implying a readiness, in all cases, to do to others as we should think it right that they should do to us. We should all habitually consider one another as brethren, the children of the same great universal parent, the care of the same benevolent providence, as training up in the same school of moral discipline here, and as heirs together of the same glorious hope of eternal life hereafter.

To fit us for these devotional and social duties, we should also be careful to exercise a constant government over our appetites and passions,

passions, that, as the apostle says, we may preserve ourselves as the *unpolluted temples of the spirit of God*.

Thus, my christian brethren, *knowing our duty, happy shall we be if we do it*; that when our Lord, after his long absence, shall return, to *take an account of his servants*, when our eyes, and when every eye, shall see him, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming; but having duly improved the talents committed to each of us, may hear from his mouth the joyful sentence, *Well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord*.

THE END.

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